we need to talk by Hatebug

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a one sided rant where i set the stage for future episodes

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we need to talk

When Vlad woke up, it was mid afternoon. His whole body was sore and his joints cracked with every step he took as he made his way to the bathroom adjacent to his sleeping chambers. He took his sweet time thoroughly enjoying a warm bath then dressed himself in the most comfortable thing his wardrobe hosted, which ended up being gray sweats and a black V-neck cotton shirt.

He walked into the kitchen and proceeded to make himself a cup of coffee. His brain was still rebooting at this point so it took a second too long for the chatter from the hallway to register.

Danny was on the phone with someone, from the sound of it, he was talking to his sister. "Like I told you, I'm completely fine Jazz. I'm in Wisconsin-" he didn't even finish the word and Jasmine started yelling at him on the other side. Danny walked into the kitchen with a nasty expression that translated an immeasurable amount of annoyance at his sister. He was too engulfed in the conversation to notice Vlad who was standing at the far corner of the room. His coffee was done brewing so the man just stood there, taking small sips and watching Danny completely lose it.

"Do you really wanna start this conversation again?" He walked over to the other side of the room and stood in front of the large window overlooking the gardens, with his back conveniently turned to Vlad.

"No-.. no Jasmine! You listen to me. I know mom and dad won't be happy about this, they made their opinion very clear concerning this whole situation. But guess what, I don't care anymore! I don't care what they think, I Don't care what you think and I think it's about time everyone starts minding their goddamn business. I went to the stupid university y'all wanted, I got the stupid degree y'all told me 'will secure my future' and you know what it did? IT MADE ME FUCKING MISERABLE! Now I'm pretty sure you feel all morally superior and shit, lecturing me about this, but your neat little moral code doesn't apply to the situation."

Here jazz interrupted him yelling something about reputation and responsibility and the public eye. And Danny let her talk long enough

for him to open the cabinet beside him, fill a glass of water from the sink in front of him and gulp the whole thing down in one go.

"Ok, stop right there. You're really playing this card now? You? The one who cried herself to sleep everyday for three months after rejecting the one person you desperately wanted, for what?" Vlad heard Jasmine's response to that loud and clear.
"Daniel William Fenton Don't you dare!"

"Oh but I dare." He slammed his hand on the marble counter cracking it. Vlad ignored that for now. "Wanna know why I dare? Because I'm not the one who had an affair with his professor for over five months while SAMULTANIOUSLY dating his nephew. I am not the one that went on and invited said professor to my wedding to watch me marry his sister's son all to portray the image of being good friends after lying to the press about it. Since this seems to be your last resource in every single conversation I think it's about time we talked about it, every time you run out of excuses you start talking about public opinion.'Danny you can't drop out of college, what will people say? Danny you can't sell the family business! Danny you can't break up with Sam, everyone has their eyes on you.'"

So far, this was all new to Vlad. He knew about the drama that ensued in Jasmine's university a couple of years ago. A professor was reported to have had a romantic relationship with one of the students on campus which was strictly prohibited for obvious reasons. Given the prestige of the university, Harvard, and the fact that the professor was already under the public eye for co-authoring a very successful and controversial book that had just been published.

The press jumped on the opportunity to cover the story but nothing came out of the investigation. He did not know, or expect Jasmine to have played a part in it. Jazz started yelling and tried to defend herself, then suddenly her tone got serious and her voice dropped down in volume. Whatever she was saying seemed to get Danny's attention and not in a good way. He gripped the edge of the counter and Vlad can see frost spiraling into spikes from where his fingers touched the already cracked marble. "Okay I see how it it."

Vlad could see the reflection of the angry green eyes on the window. "For now I have one thing to tell you, I am not coming back home.

Tell your journalist friend to write whatever the hell she wants but be ready to face the consequences." Jasmine tried to protest but Danny only said "I'll call you" before hanging up the phone.

He threw the phone away on the counter and sighed in frustration.
"Did you enjoy the show?" Danny asked without turning.
"So you knew I was here." Vlad stated, he put down his empty mug then walked over to stand just one step away from the younger man.

"Of course I did. I heard you gasp when I broke your precious marble counter." Danny closed the small gap between them when a faint green glow caught his attention. He took Vlad's Left hand in his own and traced the platinum ring hosting a series of small emerald gems.

"Why are you still wearing this thing?" Danny took off the ring and placed it on the counter. He actually knew why Vlad was wearing the ecto-ranium ring. Ever since he got his hands on the element he couldn't let it go. He told Danny it calmed him down, it silenced his ghost half and helped him find some inner peace. "We need to talk, don't we?" Vlad nodded his response.

And so they talked, however the conversation didn't go the way Vlad expected.

Usually, when Danny bothered to explain his sudden visits, he'd give a very vague reason.

'I fought with my parents over some school stuff'

'College life is being a bitch', the most common excuse.

'Sam is being a bitch', this one was one particularly low point in his life.

But most of the time he'd just disappear the moment they were done.

This time Danny picked him up, floated to his favorite living area which was the smallest and most cozy living room in the mansion. He sat him down at the end of a couch then laid down with his head resting on Vlad's lap. On any regular day, Vlad would enthusiastically voice his disapproval of all the manhandling but today was far from a regular day.

Without prompts or questions Danny began talking and he talked about everything. From the first time their little ritual started to the present day. He talked about all the stress that keeping his double life coasted him as a teenager, then all the trouble he went through trying to maintain a good public image once everyone discovered his secret.

"So you already know how it went after I got the ghost powers, it was like life wasn't satisfied with all the ways it's been fucking me over so it invented new ways to do it. Guess a dysfunctional family, financial problems, academic problems and bullying wasn't enough! Let's turn him into a half ghost and throw a bunch of apocalyptic events at him and see if he can still stand after all that! But like any dumb teenager with the self esteem of an earth worm, the social skills of a humpback whale and the charms of a honey badger, I actually liked it! It made me feel special and instead of focusing on my schoolwork like I should've been doing, I decided to play hero! Well to be honest, I didn't have much of a choice there. You know how mom and dad were with the ghost business back then. But I definitely let myself get distracted with it more than I absolutely had to, I'll admit that much.

But then when I finally started getting the help I needed, I had clockwork on my side, I had frostbite and most of the other ghosts stopped fucking with me and humans in general. So I finally found some stability in life right? I had my powers mostly under control, I started making more friends at school instead of talking to the same two people all day every day, my parents ironically toned down their ghost crazed obsession when ghosts where confirmed to be real and the Fenton products started selling, Jazz got into her dream university and dropped the 'overprotective older sister' bs and I finally got the girl I was crushing on for forever, more on THAT later.

Then some kid chooses that moment to sneak up on me and film my transformation and just like that my life was yet again thrown into the stand mixer. Like, people really need to chill man. I was SEVENTEEN! And they were commenting on my appearance, my relationships, my grades, my friends. Not even my parents were that nosy. And I started getting all these invitations to some shitty formal events and Jazz made me go to every single one of them! 'It's good to make connections! You should leave your bubble, interact with the

people more.' fuck those people!"

Vlad tried and failed to contain his laughter when Danny started mocking his sister. That didn't seem to bother the young man at all as he continued his venting.

"So I did go, and I hated absolutely every second of it. Jazz didn't, she went to every single one of them with me and she thrived on the bullshit they were serving. And I thought to myself 'okay, no problem. If she's happy, the people are happy. Everyone is happy. There's absolutely no problem, I can do this much.' and it WAS fine for a while. Then I graduated high school and I thought I could take a gap year or two, ya know, to travel a bit and maybe figure out what I wanted to do with my life? But Jazz was like 'noooooo' she somehow found me this scholarship at this private space tech program thingy at one of those public events that I didn't bother going to anymore by this point. And everyone was like 'what a great opportunity, you should go Danny, you've always wanted to be an astronaut. You'll never find an opportunity like that again.'"

Vlad heard about this one, a multinational space company opened a program to fill in some gaps in its employees. They took in a couple hundred kids with insanely high scores and academic performance and the tuition costs where insanely high as well. They used Danny to promote the program when it first started.

"So naturally, like the idiot I was back then I agreed. Then, first semester rolled around and I took one look at the material I would be learning and BOY! Was I under qualified for this. I spent most of my time in high school running around, playing hero and all that. Then I had to make an enormous effort to catch up, lift my grades and graduate high school with a half decent score in my senior year. And I'm not stupid! You know I'm not stupid, if I did my work when it needed to be done in the previous years I would've probably been one of the best students in the whole school! But I didn't, and truth was I'm not qualified at all to be in that university yet I went there anyways!" Here Danny pauses; he covers his face with his forearm and tries to collect his thoughts.

"So there I was, six whole years of high level math and physics classes that I barely understood. Spending every waking hour either

studying or being passive aggressively mocked by some of the most pretentious assholes on the planet. I poured my blood sweat and tears into that degree and yet I barely passed. Every second of it was hell! Oh and let's not forget the shit show that dealing with Sam was during this period." Here he paused again. He stood up and started pacing as he spoke.

"You know how normal people with just a lick of common sense would just SHUT THE FUCK UP when they see that their supposed 'significant other' is barely hanging on in life? Well this woman absolutely did not understand that concept at all. When we were kids, I might have found it admirable how she always stood her ground and defended what she believed in. But apparently I highly underestimated her need to prove 'she's not like other girls' in everything she does. What I also underestimated about her is the side effects that being born with a silver spoon up her ass would leave on an individual. EVERYTHING had to be done the way she'd imagine it in her head. Everything had to match her aesthetic and everything about our relationship had to be straight out of a romantic movie so she could go around and brag about it.

She demanded the long calls, she demanded the date nights, she demanded the gifts. She would call like ten times a day, throw a fit if I don't pick up then once I do pick up, it's either her bragging about how amazing her college experience is or listing all of the things I should be changing about myself, because being the amazing Danny phantom wasn't enough to feed her hero fetish anymore. She made friends with my parents and my sister so every time I went home I would find her already there and whatever energy university left in me, she would suck out.

I thought about breaking up with her. a lot. but I never found a good time to do it. Either a ghost attack or something would happen and I would get this rush of nostalgia from when we were kids and she wasn't acting like an entitled piece of shit! And she was actually helpful and understanding! Then sometimes Jazz would step in and talk me out of it or my stupid sense of responsibility would kick in. 'you can't dump the girl like that Daniel! You've been together since you were fifteen, look at all the things you've been through! Surely there must be another solution'. So I stuck with it, I tried to meet her

impossibly high standards, I tried to be there for her and communicate and overall be a decent human being.
But you know what she does? SHE DUMPED ME! On charismas eve! In front of my parent! Then stormed out of the room crying as if I'm the problem, all because I refused to go with her to a stupid party on New Year's Eve BECAUSE I had too much studying to do. The university gave us this mini break and I was so thankful to get an opportunity to get a little bit ahead but miss Manson has decided my fate already and it was to watch her get wasted in front of some strangers then fly her to her house so everyone could see us together. "

That must've hurt. Vlad knew that they broke up at that time, all because Danny ended up spending New Years Eve with him. What Danny told him that time is that she dumped him and she hasn't been picking up on his calls. Vlad didn't know anything about the nature of their relationship so he assumed Danny was still disgustingly in love with her and he only visited him to punish himself for the breakup in a way. Looks like he couldn't have been more wrong.

"So she ghosts me for half a year and I can FINALLY breathe again. I was still struggling with university but at least I could get some alone time when I needed it now. Then one day while at a book store, by pure curiosity, I opened up a teen magazine and to my surprise I find an interview with Miss Sam Manson where she completely shreds my legacy. And now I feel weird saying legacy but that's literally what she did, she explained how 'Incompetent' I was when I first started, and went on to explain how many times I allegedly fucked up, how many times the safety of regular civilians and public property was not my main priority. All of this while obviously failing to highlight the fact that I was FOURTEEN and had no goddamn idea what I was doing. She goes on and explains that without her and my parent's technology I wouldn't be half of what I am today- it was all so petty honestly. And this wasn't even some obscure magazine, it was a very popular one. A lot of young impressionable people saw and believed that.
So like any human being in my situation, finding themselves being publically humiliated for what was practically human nature I just, I couldn't take it! I couldn't reach her right away because unlike her who was preparing for some dump environmentalist degree, I

actually had shit to do. So I slept on it and at the first opportunity I went up to her house and confronted her about. I tried to explain that what she did was not okay and I even gave her an opportunity to explain herself. You know what she did? She said, and I quote 'if the truth bothers you so much maybe you should work on yourself and try doing better.' Then slammed the door in my face."

Vlad was seriously impressed at the amount of patience and self control that prevented Daniel from turning her into a headline right then and there.

"You already know what happened next, I came to you, we did the thing. Yada yada. Then I decided to just forget about the whole ordeal, put it all behind me and focus on getting through the last year of uni. So that's what I did, for that last year I poured my blood sweat and tears into my studies and I finally, FIALLY graduated." Danny sighed deeply remembering the relief he felt when the scores came in and everything was over, then he remembered. " So the graduation ceremony right?" he says and his eyes turns a bight angry green. Vlad knows Danny visited him sometime after the graduation ceremony was held but it was one of those times where he practically didn't say anything.

"I walk on stage to receive my certificate. Everything is perfectly fine until I see her, in the guest section with my parents holding a sign that says "go tiger" or some bullcrap and cheering and clapping as if nothing happened.

Turns out her little interview with that magazine was just a cheap trick to get my attention. she had told everyone that we're back together afterwards, including my parents and has been throwing my name around for clout's sake, so people would still invite her to parties and basically talk to her. Because her dream life In college was apparently only possible because people know her as my girlfriend." He explained and flopped back on the couch. He manifested a thin layer of snow on his palms and rubbed that on his face, this was one of the many nervous habits he picked along the years.

"And what did you do?" Vlad prompted him to go on. Danny was clearly getting tired of the conversation but if he's talking he might as

well get everything off his chest and get it over with. And he clearly had a lot to get off his chest. The atmosphere in the room shifted when Danny heard his question. The lights dimmed noticeably and Danny's breath got so cold and heavy that Vlad could see the icy air leaving his mouth when he'd exhale. When he spoke his voice lost all of the agitated frustrated energy it had earlier, this time it sounded as cold as the ice he was breathing.

"At that moment I wished I could've just walked up to her and ripped her head off her shoulders right then and there. But I didn't. I took my certificate, got off stage and walked out of the building. Then I flew home, went through the portal to the zone, flew to the most secluded area in there and screamed my throat raw. Then I came here."

That explains why he barely said a word the whole time he was there and when he did speak he didn't say anything louder than a whisper. Right now though, Danny seemed to get lost in deep thought for a minute, no wonder recounting the events in his head.

"Hey, can we lay down or something," he suddenly turned to Vlad and asked awkwardly.

"You mean… cuddle?" the man asked hesitantly.

"Yeah, that…please?" He hit him with the pappy eyes, like Vlad could ever refuse him regardless.

After a bit of shifting around on the large sofa, they settled down in a comfortable position with Danny sprawled on top of him and his head rested on the man's chest right where his heart is. Vlad held him loosely in his arms and Danny whined like a little brat until the man tightens his grip around him.

"You comfortable now princess?" Vlad asked teasingly. "Yes, but do the heat thingy on your chest." What Danny was referring to is Vlad's counterpart to his own ice power. Vlad rarely used it in any given situation because his laser was simply stronger and far more convenient, but ever since Danny discovered he had those powers he absolutely relished using Vlad as self heating body pillow. Vlad did what he was asked, raising his temperature just enough to let Danny

feel it through their clothes. The boy took in a deep breath then let it out slowly.

“Apparently one of the girls witnessed my little tantrum and knew enough about the situation. It was either Katie or Amber I think. Anyways, I don’t know if they did this out of pity or fear, but they paid her a visit and not so nicely asked her to fuck off. And thankfully she did. I haven’t heard from her since. So that was about one and a half years ago. My parents decided to retire shortly after because now ‘both of their kids have graduated and they can finally rest.’ They bought a cozy farmhouse near my aunt’s and they’ve been living the life ever since.” Danny yawned; he was noticeably tired from recounting the events of the past few years.

“so they left the family business for me to decide the fate of, it has clearly lost all the emotional value to them the moment they realized something they built sent me halfway to the other side. I wanted to sell the damn thing and use the money to do all of that traveling I wanted and Jazz has been doing whatever in her power to stop me from doing so. The end.” He closed his eyes and focused on the steady heartbeat underneath his head. He then lifted his head to look Vlad in the eye.

“I’m sorry, I know that me venting for hours doesn’t count as talking. I don’t know how much of this you already know or didn’t want to know in the first place but... I needed you to know all that to understand where I’m coming from.”

“shh it’s okay.” Vlad pulled him back down into a hug and placed a hand on the back of his neck. “You answered most of the questions I had anyways so don’t even think about it.” Vlad assured him. A few seconds of silence passed and Vlad thought Danny drifted asleep, until the boy spoke to him softly.

“Thank you so much for all you’ve done for me, Vlad.” He started and Vlad was genuinely confused. So far, beyond what happened in the morning, they didn’t have anything that could qualify as a civil conversation. Their relationship didn’t get anywhere past the bedroom and anything one of them said had the sole purpose of turning on the other. But then Danny explained himself “I know you didn’t always like it but you still played along with whatever I asked

of you. Also, what I said this morning, I mean it. I'm sorry for all of the trouble I caused you. I knew you had feelings for me and I took advantage of that and I'm sorry. So um..." Danny hesitated. Vlad was still stunned at the 'I meant what I said in the morning' part.

"So, if you want to uh- take our…relationship to the next level, I'd be more than happy to do so."
Vlad sat up, forcing Danny to do the same and slide to sit on his lap. "Are you sure of what you're saying right now young man?" He gripped Danny's hips and the boy could feel his hands burning hot on his skin and gazed right into his soul with blood red eyes. Danny used to find those eyes extremely daunting as a kid but right now he couldn't perceive them as anything but erotic.

"Yes. Very sure. Never been more sure of anything in my entire existence." He assured him and Vlad wasted no time pulling him closer by the hips and kissed him senseless.

Whenever he started to feel lost these arms where the first thing he'd run into, and every single time Vlad would serve him a piece of heaven.Then just as he starts going crazy for more he would run away and go back to live his miserable life. But he wasn't about to do any of that again. This time he was going to stop wasting his life trying to please people and he was going to do exactly what he wanted. This time he was here to stay.